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FERGUS MILLAR

Government and Diplomacy in the Roman Empire during the First Three Centuries

THE DIPLOMACY OF the Roman Empire in the period of its greatest extent and stability, let us say until towards the middle of the third century AD, has received very little attention. A recent collection of studies on ancient diplomacy ignores it altogether.[1] It is true that in this period the Empire faced no major external threat, and remarkably few significant internal revolts. The great Jewish revolt of AD 66, culminating in the siege of Jerusalem in 70, which absorbed almost one-seventh of the entire Roman army, offers a clear indication of how much the Empire owed to the absence of national identities within its borders.[2] The period of stability ended precisely with the overthrow in the 220s of the relatively weak Parthian empire, centred on Babylonia, and the rise of what was to become a serious external threat, the new Persian dynasty, the Sassanians or Sassanids. Observers in the Roman Empire were immediately conscious of how much had changed. Near the end of his great *Roman History* in eighty books, which began with the arrival of Aeneas in Italy and concluded with his own second consulship in 229, Cassius Dio writes (lxxx, 3, 1-4, Loeb trans.):

But the situation in Mesopotamia became still more alarming and inspired a more genuine fear in all, not merely the people in Rome, but the rest of mankind as well. For Artaxerxes, a Persian, after conquering the Parthians in three battles and killing their king, Artabanus, made a campaign against Hatra, in the endeavour to capture it as a base for attacking the Romans ...

[1] *Antike Diplomatie*, ed. E. Olshausen and H. Biller (Darmstadt, 1979).

[2] For revolts, or their absence, and national identities and their general absence, see, for example, S.L. Dyson, 'Native Revolt Patterns in the Roman Empire', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.3, ed. H. Temporini (Berlin-New York, 1975), pp. 138-75; M. Goodman, *The Upper Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt of AD 66* (Cambridge, 1987); F. Millar, 'Empire, Community and Culture in the Roman Near East: Greeks, Syrians, Jews and Arabs', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, xxxviii (1987), 143-64.

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He accordingly became a source of fear to us; for he was encamped with a large army so as to threaten not only Mesopotamia but also Syria, and he boasted that he would win back everything that the ancient Persians had once held, as far as the Grecian Sea, claiming that all this was his rightful inheritance from his forefathers.

The Persians never did reach the Aegean; though four centuries later their invasion and brief conquest of Syria and Palestine, and Heraclius' great counter-invasion, were to form the background to the sudden and wholly unexpected conquests of Islam. Long before that, however, the Imperialist self-image of the new dynasty had produced, in the form of the great inscription of Shapur I at Naqsh-e-Rustam in Iran, the first documentary representation which we have of the external relations of the Roman Empire as seen from outside:

When at first we had become established in the empire, Gordian Caesar raised in all of the Roman Empire a force from the Goth and German realms and marched on Babylonia [Assyria] (Asuristan) against the Empire of Iran and against us. On the border of Babylonia at Misikhe, a great 'frontal' battle occurred. Gordian Caesar was killed and the Roman force was destroyed. And the Romans made Philip Caesar. Then Philip Caesar came to us for terms, and to ransom their lives, gave us 500,000 *denars*, and became tributary to us. And for this reason we have renamed Misikhe Peroz-Shapur.

And Caesar lied again and did wrong to Armenia. Then we attacked the Roman Empire and annihilated at Barbalissos a Roman force of 60,000 and Syria and the environs of Syria we burned, ruined and pillaged all. In this one campaign we conquered of the Roman Empire fortresses and towns: the town of Sura, Barbalissos ... a total of 37 towns with surroundings.

In the third campaign, when we attacked Carrhae and Urhai [Edessa] and were besieging Carrhae and Edessa Valerian Caesar marched against us. He had with him a force of 70,000 from Germany, Raetia, Noricum ... And beyond Carrhae and Edessa we had a great battle with Valerian Caesar. We made prisoner ourselves with our own hands Valerian Caesar and others, chiefs of that army, the praetorian prefect, senators; we made all prisoners and deported them to Persis.

And Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia we burned, ruined and pillaged. In that campaign we conquered of the Roman Empire the town of Samosata, Alexandria on the Issus ... all these cities with their surroundings.[3]

This passage begins with Shapur's accession in 240-1, and culminates with the capture of Valerian in 260, the first and only occasion on which

[3] The inscription, in Parthian, Middle Persian, and Greek, is quoted from the translation by R.N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (Munich, 1984), pp. 371-3.

a Roman Emperor was captured alive. As such, it represents very accurately the drastic nature of the third-century crisis of the Empire. While the crisis was overcome, and the Empire in AD 400 still ruled a larger area than it had in AD 40, its strategic centre of gravity had shifted irreversibly eastwards, with consequences too obvious to need spelling out here.

Essentially, therefore, Cassius Dio's report, and Shapur's triumphant proclamation, put up in three languages far away in Iran, reflect a fundamentally new phase in the history of the Empire. In this phase an Emperor may be captured in person in the field, be killed in battle (as Shapur alleges of Gordian III, in fact, perhaps killed by his own men), have to treat for terms, or pay his enemy money to obtain peace. Gordian III is also described as bringing against Persia forces which include contingents of Goths and Germans. If that claim is based on fact, it represents one of our earliest items of evidence of Gothic forces serving under Roman command, and suggests their arrival on the shores of the Black Sea some time in the later second century; other documentary evidence shows that units of Goths had been enrolled in the Roman army by the early third century.[4] Goths, too, were to have an important role in the later history of the Empire. The first Roman Emperor certainly to die in battle was Decius, killed by the Goths in 251; the second was Valens, when his forces were crushed by the Goths at Hadrianople (Edirne in European Turkey), deep in the Roman provinces, in 378.

As we shall see, and as the enrolment of Goths considerably earlier than previously attested itself illustrates, many features of the Roman state during the crisis of the Empire have their origin in the earlier period of general stability and security. None the less, there are features which make the period before the rise of Sassanid Persia distinctive, and which raise particular problems as to the nature and conduct of Roman diplomacy as it then was. Although the subject has attracted relatively little attention, it was not unimportant. For, even given a remarkable degree of external security and the absence of major external threats, the frontiers of the Empire, stretching over several thousand miles, inevitably brought it into contact with a large variety of peoples, speaking different languages and at very different stages of development. Whether we think of purely local contact, aimed at solving disputes or controlling the movements of traders and pastoralists, or of important negotiations conducted centrally, some means for the adjustment of relations clearly had to exist, and did.

[4] See M. Speidel, 'The Roman Army in Arabia', *Roman Army Studies*, i (1984), 254-8.

Still, it is easy to see why the subject has not occupied a central place in our conception of the early Empire as a political system – the bibliography of this topic is by no means extensive[5] – for it is marked by striking anomalies and contradictions. First, whose Empire was it? What body or person was the sovereign? In fact, as we shall see, the public official discourse of the early Imperial period was unambiguous in representing the Empire as that of the *populus Romanus*, the Roman People as a collectivity.[6] But whatever functions the assemblies of the Roman People still fulfilled, the conduct of foreign relations was not one of them. Indeed, even in the Republic, it had been one of the features distinguishing the city-state of Rome from a typical Greek democracy, that ambassadors from foreign powers never came before the assemblies of the People. The People had once voted on declarations of war and the making of peace-treaties, but that function too disappeared in the later Republic.[7]

Embassies from foreign powers had in fact always appeared before the Senate: as Polybius rightly noted in the course of his well-known analysis of the Roman constitution, the reception of embassies was one of the Senate's most important functions, and also one which tended to give foreigners the (false) impression (shared however by many moderns) that the Senate could be regarded unambiguously as the 'government' of Rome (Polybius vi, 13, 7-8). This central role of the Senate was remembered, and still claimed, throughout the period of the Empire with which we are concerned. Our clearest indication of the importance attached to it is in the fictitious speech which Cassius Dio, in his *Roman History*, puts into the mouth of Maecenas, supposedly addressing Augustus (liii, 31, 1):

Moreover, as regards other matters, you would seem to me to be arranging things for the best, if as regards embassies both from enemies and from allies,

[5] The major background survey of the evidence is C. Phillipson, *The International Law and Custom of Ancient Greece and Rome* I-II (London, 1911); for the Roman Empire the most important discussions are J. Gagé, 'L'Empereur romain et les rois', *Revue Historique*, ccxxi (1959), 221-60; and M. Lemosse, *Le régime des relations internationales dans le Haut-Empire romain* (Paris, 1967). The present paper also draws on some aspects of F. Millar, 'Emperors, Frontiers and Foreign Relations, 31 BC to AD 378', *Britannia*, xiii (1982), 1-23.

[6] For this theme see F. Millar, 'Imperial Ideology in the Tabula Siarensis', to appear in *Estudios sobre la Tabula Siarensis*, ed. J. González (Madrid, 1988). Add a typical example not used there: Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* iii, 136, quotes the inscription from the triumphal monument set up to commemorate Augustus' subjection of a long list of Alpine peoples: 'because under his command and auspices all the Alpine *gentes* ... have been brought under the *imperium* of the *populus Romanus*'.

[7] See J.W. Rich, *Declaring War in the Roman Republic in the Period of Transmarine Expansion* (Brussels, 1976).

whether kings or peoples, you were to bring them first before the Senate. For, other considerations apart, it is both appropriate and impressive for the Senate to give the appearance of being sovereign in all things, and that there should be a plurality of people to appear as adversaries in the case of those of them [foreign envoys] who are contumacious.

Though the narrative setting of the speech is the reign of Augustus, its contents were undoubtedly intended to refer to Dio's own time. The words were perhaps written about AD 230; in which case, they carry a particularly appropriate message. For, on our evidence (see further pp. 366-7 below), precisely during the course of the second century had embassies from both outside and inside the Empire ceased to appear before the Senate, and come instead to be directed solely to the Emperor in person.[8]

The relationship between the Emperor and the Senate thus points towards two further elements of ambiguity in the character of the Empire as a sovereign state. In spite of the formal emphasis on the sovereignty of the *populus Romanus*, a wide range of evidence illustrates the fact that from the beginning of the reign of Augustus, diplomatic traffic from outside the Empire tended markedly to direct itself to the Emperor in person, wherever he happened to be, as to the effective head of government. Yet for at least a century and a half after the battle of Actium in 31 BC, which ensured the sole rule of the future Augustus, embassies and allied kings from outside the Empire might also appear to speak before the Senate in Rome. The legacy of the origins of the monarchy from within a republic was thus to be remarkably durable. Nothing shows more clearly than the words which Dio puts into the mouth of Maecenas that this role of the Senate was no ornament, but a valued function which was to be recalled decades after it had apparently lapsed into disuse.

However, valued as it clearly was, the diplomatic and foreign-relations role of the Senate had been overshadowed from the reign of Augustus by that of the Emperor. This aspect of his function plays an important part in the *Res Gestae*, the record of his achievements, which Augustus composed himself, and left behind on his death, to be inscribed on two bronze tablets which flanked the entrance to his massive Mausoleum on the Campus Martius in Rome (ch. 35):

To me there were often sent embassies from Kings in India, never previously witnessed before any *dux* of the Romans. The Bastarnae and the Scythians sought our *amicitia* by embassies, as did kings of the Sarmatae

[8] See R.J.A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome* (Princeton, 1984), esp. pp. 425-30.

living on this side and the other side of the river Tanais [the Don], and the King of the Albani, the Hiberi and the Medes. To me there fled suppliant kings of the Parthians ... [and other peoples]. To me the King of the Parthians, Phraates, son of Orodes, sent all his sons and grandsons to Italy as hostages, not after defeat in war but seeking our *amicitia* by the use of his children as pledges. Several other *gentes* tried the faith [*fides*] of the *populus Romanus* while I was *princeps*, who had never previously had any exchange of embassies and *amicitia* with the *populus Romanus*.

Contemporary evidence confirms that such embassies did reach Augustus, from both West and East.

The geographer Strabo describes how British kings had gained the friendship of Augustus by sending embassies, and paying court, and had made offerings on the Capitol in Rome (*Geography* iv, 5, 3, 200). The latter point again illustrates the ambiguity of sovereignty in the early Empire, for by a long-established tradition of the Republic, which persisted into the Empire, foreign peoples and rulers symbolized their acceptance of Roman hegemony by offering sacrifices or making permanent dedications on the Capitol, therefore in or near the ancient temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus; it was there too that copies of treaties had long been deposited.[9] That same ambiguity appears in the inscription from Apamea in Syria recording a local dynast from this region in the time of Augustus, called Dexandros, '[who] by the decree of the deified Augustus, because of his friendship and loyalty to the Roman People, was inscribed as friend and ally on bronze tablets on the Capitol'.[10] But this inscription introduces yet another form of ambiguity to which we shall return.

As regards embassies from far beyond the Empire, to the East, our best evidence comes again from Strabo, who quotes the account of an Indian embassy on its way to meet Augustus given by another contemporary, Nicolaus of Damascus (Strabo, *Geography* xv, 1, 73, 719, Loeb trans.):

He says that at Antioch, near Daphnê, he chanced to meet the Indian ambassadors who had been despatched to Caesar Augustus; that the letter plainly indicated more than three ambassadors, but that only three had survived (whom he says he saw), but the rest, mostly by reason of the long journeys, had died; and that the letter was written in Greek on a skin; and that it plainly showed that Porus was the writer, and that, although he was ruler of six hundred kings, still he was anxious to be a friend to Caesar, and was ready, not only to allow him a passage through his country, wherever

[9] R. Mellor, 'The Dedications on the Capitoline Hill', *Chiron*, viii (1978), 319-30.
[10] *Année Épigraphique* 1976, no. 678.

he wished to go, but also to co-operate with him in anything that was honourable. Nicolaus says that this was the content of the letter to Caesar, and that the gifts carried to Caesar were presented by eight naked servants, who were clad only in loin-cloths besprinkled with sweet-smelling odours; and that the gifts consisted of the Hermes, a man who was born without arms, whom I myself have seen, and large vipers, and a serpent ten cubits in length, and a river tortoise three cubits in length, and a partridge larger than a vulture.

We happen to know from Cassius Dio's *Roman History* that this embassy, or what was left of it, appeared before Augustus when he was spending the winter of 20-19 BC on Samos (liv, 9, 8-10). Augustus had also spent the previous winter on Samos, and there an Ethiopian embassy had reached him, sent on by the prefect of Egypt. Strabo again gives a very illuminating account of the reaction of this Ethiopian embassy, originally sent by Queen Candace, when the prefect told them that they must go on from him to the Emperor (*Geography*, xvii, 1, 54, 820-1, Loeb trans.):

Meantime Candace marched against the garrison with many thousands of men, but Petronius set out to its assistance and arrived at the fortress first; and when he had made the place thoroughly secure by sundry devices, ambassadors came, but he bade them go to Caesar; and when they asserted that they did not know who Caesar was or where they should have to go to find him, he gave them escorts; and they went to Samos, since Caesar was there and intended to proceed to Syria from there, after despatching Tiberius to Armenia. And when the ambassadors had obtained everything they pled for, he even remitted the tributes which he had imposed.

The ambassadors' reaction introduces, very early in the history of the Empire, a question to become of ever-increasing relevance, especially from the middle of the second century onwards. If it were necessary to appear before the Emperor, as it often was, where was he to be found? The remarkable mobility of Emperors, whose journeys are the subject of a valuable recent study,[11] is a crucial and underestimated aspect of the Empire as a political system.

But, wherever the Emperor happened to be, the leaders of most groups from beyond the borders of the Empire understood from the beginning that it was to him in person that they should go on diplomatic business. At this point we encounter further ambiguities. It is by no means clear that any concept of the borders of the Empire prevailed, or that there would have been any agreement about which regions or peoples lay

[11] H. Halfmann, *Itinera Principum: Geschichte und Typologie der Kaiserreisen im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart, 1986).

within the Empire, and which outside it. Fixed and visible frontier-installations (walls, pallisades, lines of forts) were created in some areas in the course of the Imperial period, for instance in the form of Hadrian's Wall, or the defences of southern Germany. But it is not certain even that these were regarded as marking legal borders between Roman and non-Roman territory. They were in any case an exception. In many areas there will have been no definable moment when the traveller will have known that he was entering or leaving the Roman Empire. Moreover, the Empire, especially as it was under Augustus, incorporated a large number of regions ruled by allied kings (the so-called 'client' kings), for instance in the Alps, Thrace, Eastern Anatolia, the Syrian region, Arabia, and Mauretania.[12] There is no unambiguous way of saying whether such regions formed part of the Roman Empire or not. In some sense they clearly did. Strabo, bringing his *Geography* to a close with a description of the division of the provinces between the Roman People and the Emperor (that is, those provinces whose governors he appointed), ends by saying categorically 'kings and dynasts and tetrarchies belong to his part, and always have done so' (xviii, 3, 25, 840). But if the criterion of belonging to the Empire were taken as the payment of tribute, then these 'client' kingdoms did not belong to it. As a subject of the tetrarch Herodes Antipas, and living in Galilee, Jesus paid no tribute to Rome. The issue of whether or not tribute should be paid by Jews arose, as the Synoptic Gospels agree (Mark 12: 13-17; Matt. 22: 17-22; Luke 20: 21-6), when he visited Jerusalem, now under direct Roman rule. But it would be an over-simplification to say that Jesus was not a subject of the Empire.

None the less, the step-by-step absorption of the 'client' kingdoms was a significant, if protracted, process. Not until AD 46 could anyone have walked round the shores of the Mediterranean while remaining all the time either in Italy or provinces paying tribute to Rome. And not until the second century did the Empire acquire a strategic shape and character such that its defence need not depend to any significant degree on 'client' kingdoms.[13]

If our concern is with the nature of the Empire as a diplomatic system, however, the mere fact of the extension of provincialization will not remove – indeed, rather accentuates – the ambiguities with which we are faced. For quite apart from those unsubdued tribal peoples who

[12] On these kings, see D.C. Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King: The Character of Client Kingship* (London, 1984).

[13] For this theme, note the very stimulating analysis by E.N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century AD to the Third* (Baltimore-London, 1976).

remained within the bounds of the Empire, many provinces, especially in the Greek east, contained 'free' cities which governors were not supposed to visit, and which lay outside their jurisdiction. One of these, Aphrodisias in Caria, took the precaution early in the third century of inscribing on the wall of its theatre a long series of Imperial letters confirming its privileged status. The publication of this archive in 1982 provided a rich store of illustration of the diplomatic practices governing exchanges between such a city and the Emperor.[14] In particular, when a new Emperor came to the throne, the city council would pass a decree, expressing the city's joy at his accession, and ambassadors would be sent who would hand over the decree, accompanying it with a brief speech, heard by the Emperor in person. He then addressed to the city a letter in Greek, which was brought back to their homeland by the ambassadors. The custom continued at least until the middle of the third century. The latest document added to the archive-wall at Aphrodisias is a reply from the Emperor Decius and his son Herennius, dated to AD 250 (no. 25, trans. Reynolds):

Imperator Caesar C. Messius Q. Traianus Decius, Pius, Felix, Augustus, holding tribunician power for the third time, consul for the second time, designated for the third, father of his country, proconsul, and Q. Herennius Etruscus Messius Decius, Pontifex Maximus, holding the tribunician power for the first time, consul designate, to the Magistrates, Council and People of the Aphrodisians, greetings. It was to be expected, both because of the goddess for whom your city is named and because of your relationship with the Romans and loyalty to them, that you rejoiced at the establishment of our kingship and made the proper sacrifice and prayers. We preserve your existing freedom and all the other rights which you have received from the emperors who preceded us, being willing also to give fulfilment to your hopes for the future. Aurelius Theodorus and Aurelius Onesimus carried out the duties of ambassadors. Farewell.

It would, however, be a mistake to conclude that the elaborate diplomatic protocol which characterizes this letter is a function specifically of Aphrodisias' status as a free city, or, as other documents in the archive put it, 'removed from the formula of the province'. For what is distinctive about the archive is not that, but lies in the clear indication it gives of the particular privileges such a 'free and immune' city enjoyed: for instance, non-payment of Roman taxes, exemption from visits by the proconsul of Asia, and even exemption from claims on the services of its citizens made by other cities in the province or by the provincial council.

[14] J. Reynolds, *Aphrodisias and Rome* (London, 1982).

Precisely because these privileges were exceptional was repeated 'diplomatic' activity required to ensure their protection and preservation.

Such activity, directed to the Emperor, did not in itself mark Aphrodisias as a 'free' city, nor ought it to lead us to characterize Aphrodisias as a place which belonged notionally, though of course not geographically, beyond the borders of the Empire. The truth is exactly the opposite, that most of the evidence for exchanges which have the *form* of diplomatic dealings between the Emperor and a foreign sovereign power in fact comes from his dealings with cities and communities unambiguously subject to the Roman Empire, which paid tribute to it, and which were in every sense within its borders.[15]

Our extensive knowledge of the form and nature of these exchanges is largely, but not wholly, a function of a feature of Graeco-Roman culture which Ramsey MacMullen aptly nicknamed 'the epigraphic habit'[16]: that is to say, the custom illustrated above of inscribing in public, on stone or bronze, documents which were felt for various reasons (glory, status, preservation of privileges) to be worth publicizing in permanent form. The mass of our evidence for 'diplomatic' exchanges with the Emperor comes from cities like Aphrodisias, in the Greek-speaking part of the Empire. It is impossible to tell for certain whether the much smaller number of such documents from the Latin-speaking West is a product of the lesser involvement of communities from this region in such diplomatic traffic, or their less-developed attachment to the epigraphic habit, or (as is quite likely) both.

We may be certain, at any rate, first, that long before the establishment of monarchic rule by Augustus, embassies from provincial and allied communities had addressed themselves not only to the Senate in Rome but to individual Roman commanders in the field; and second, that immediately after the battle of Actium in 31 BC, such communities were aware that the source of authority had been decisively concentrated in one man, and acted accordingly. We may take as a clear example the reply which Octavian, the future Augustus, wrote from Ephesus to the small Syrian city of Rhosus, some time between the battle on 31 September and the end of the year. It was addressed in formal style to 'the magistrates, council and people of the sacred, inviolate and autonomous city of the Rhosians', and began with the standard greeting:

If you are well, it is well; I too, with my army, am well. The ambassadors sent by you ... having come to me at Ephesus, addressed me on the matters

[15] For this topic, see F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London, 1977), esp. ch. vii.

[16] R. MacMullen, 'The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire', *American Journal of Philology*, ciii (1982), 233-46.

on which they had instructions. On receiving them I found them to be patriotic and good men, and accepted the honours and the gold crown. When I come to those parts I will do my best to be of service to you and to preserve the privileges of the city.

Once again we owe our knowledge of this exchange entirely to the fact that the city decided to have this and other related documents inscribed publicly.[17] It would be possible to cite comparable examples from the following centuries, but is surely unnecessary. Such exchanges can be shown to have been initiated by all types of cities, or self-governing communities. The composition of decrees, the sending of embassies, the reception of these embassies at a formal session by the Emperor, the delivery of the written decrees to the accompaniment of a brief oration, and the bringing back of a reply: such formal exchanges were common both to places which stood in some legalistic sense 'outside' the Imperial system, and to ones which might be presumed to have been far inside it, to have been in a real sense part of the Roman *res publica* itself – by that I mean regular *coloniae*, formally established by the *populus Romanus* 'of which those *coloniae* can be regarded as being miniature effigies and as it were representations', as Aulus Gellius put it in the second century (*Noctes Atticae* xvi, 13). But such *coloniae*, whether situated in Italy, all of whose inhabitants were Roman citizens, or in the provinces, in which case the status of *coloniae* itself automatically conferred the Roman citizenship, none the less addressed themselves to the Emperor, and were addressed by him, in precisely the 'diplomatic' manner, more suggestive of equal sovereign states, described above. The same is also true of tribute-paying communities, enjoying no specific Roman status, situated in the Latin-speaking Western provinces. So, for instance, we find Vespasian in the 70s replying to an embassy from a totally obscure community in northern Corsica. Once again our knowledge of the exchange is owed entirely to the inscription which the community later put up:

Imperator Caesar Vespasianus Augustus to the magistrates and senators of the Vanacini, greeting.
I am pleased to learn that Otacilius Sagitta, my friend and *procurator*, exercised his authority over you in such a way as to earn your commendation. On the controversy which you are engaged in with the Mariani ... The business was conducted by the ambassadors Lasemus son of Leucanus, priest of Augustus, and Eunus son of Tomasus, priest of Augustus.[18]

[17] R.K. Sherk, *Roman Documents from the Greek East (Senatus Consulta and Epistulae to the Age of Augustus)* (Baltimore, 1969), no. 58, iii.
[18] *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* x, no. 8038.

In this case the real subordination of the community to Imperial control is made perfectly explicit, while the conventional diplomatic form is maintained.

We are not, however, entirely dependent for our knowledge of the nature of these exchanges on the determination of provincial towns to immortalize in public form the answers they received from Emperors. While diplomatic (or other) archives, in the sense familiar from more recent periods of history, are unknown, a scattering of comparable texts exist preserved on perishable materials, notably private copies found on papyri from Roman Egypt. One striking example, almost (in a weak sense) deserving the term 'archive', is provided by a group of papyri showing exactly comparable embassies, with replies in letter form, being directed to Emperors from Claudius in the mid-first century to Severus Alexander in the early third, by the world-wide association (literally 'oecumenical synod') of Greek actors, that is, professionals who performed at the major festivals.[19]

The reception of such embassies was a regular public occasion for the Emperors, and hence for that reason a fruitful source of anecdotes illustrating their notoriously wide range of personal peculiarities. It is significant that while jurisdiction, another role performed by Emperors in person, was often delegated, especially from the early third century on, the hearing of embassies almost never was. The sole exception is provided by Augustus, in advanced old age.[20]

It would be to diverge too far from the purpose of this paper to ask how far the maintenance (on the part of provincial governors as well as of the Emperor himself) of a sort of universal fiction of local sovereignty and entitlement on the part of provincial cities to conduct diplomatic-style relations in the manner of an independent state, contributed to the stability of the Empire, and the acceptance of it, or at least absence of consistent opposition to it, among the ruling classes of the provinces. The diplomatic system of the Empire, as sketched above, did, however, implicitly remember and recognize the fact that the vast majority of the locally self-governing cities and communities of the provinces had once been genuinely independent, and had come within the orbit of Roman provincial government and of the payment of tribute to Rome, in a complex variety of ways, from alliance to outright conquest.

In the Roman Empire, therefore, even in Italy itself (most of whose cities were also not creations of Rome, and had once been independent), diplomatic forms more suggestive at first sight of foreign relations were carefully preserved. Moreover, it is highly significant that the structure

[19] F. Millar, *The Emperor*, pp. 460-1.
[20] Cassius Dio, *Roman History* liv, 33, 5; lvi, 25, 7.

of the Imperial court, or entourage, was clearly marked by the need to be able to make the necessary replies in appropriate form. In the speech which Cassius Dio in his *Roman History* puts into the mouth of Maecenas, addressing Augustus, he interestingly suggests restricting embassies from provincial cities to matters requiring a decision (*diagnōsis*) from the Emperor, that is to disputes between at least two cities; other requests should be sent on by the local provincial governor (lii, 30, 9). So ingrained was the conception that disputes between city embassies ought to be heard by the Emperor, that even Dio, whose attitudes were strongly hierarchical, could not envisage the ending of this Imperial role. More pertinent here, however, at a later point in the speech Maecenas is even made to envisage all the chief functionaries at the Emperor's side, other than the Praetorian Prefects, and officials concerned with finance, being employed to answer, in various forms, the addresses and petitions made by both cities and individuals (lii, 33, 5): 'Moreover, as regards judicial hearings and letters, the decrees of the cities, and the petitions of individuals, and whatever else is relevant to the government of the Empire, take aides and assistants from the equestrian order.'

A wider and much-disputed issue is being touched on here, namely the extent to which the Imperial system was primarily passive, directed to a significant degree to answering requests or solving disputes emanating from below. It may suffice to say here that the (admittedly unsatisfactory) evidence does indeed reveal Imperial secretaries with functions of the sort suggested by Dio through 'Maecenas': men with titles such as *a cognitionibus* (to do with judicial cases), *ab epistulis* (to do with letters), and *a libellis* (to do with petitions). But, in a way which remains very puzzling, the evidence reveals no Imperial 'secretaries' whose titles suggest responsibility for the positive or general forms of instruction which Emperors did indeed issue: the *mandata*, or codes of instruction given to provincial governors and other officials; or Imperial *edicta*, general pronouncements which were not (in principle) addressed to any one community or individual. It remains quite unclear which 'secretaries', if any, were concerned in the composition of the sometimes extensive, detailed, and declamatory Imperial *edicta*.

The fact that our evidence does not even record the titles of any officials concerned with these two important types of Imperial pronouncement merely accentuates a more general and profound problem, first as to the working of the Imperial court as a whole, as a bureaucratic or governmental system, and second as to the specific role of the Emperor in deciding the content of Imperial replies, or even, perhaps, in the actual composition of the relevant texts. The problem is not decided by the mere fact that our sources invariably talk *as if* all forms of Imperial

pronouncement came from the Emperor himself. None the less, two considerations serve to establish a framework for the question. First, there is nothing in our entire evidence to suggest that any form of Imperial pronouncement could be issued in his name, or as from him, by any Imperial agency functioning from a place from which the Emperor himself was absent: for instance from Rome, if the Emperor were currently at an Imperial villa elsewhere in Italy, or in the provinces, or on campaign. All Imperial pronouncements emanated at least from the immediate vicinity, or entourage, of the Emperor.

Second, it would be reasonable, and in accordance with the basic character both of Roman political life and of Roman law, to see verbal, or oral, pronouncements as primary, and their written manifestations as secondary. Roman law depended fundamentally on verbal statements made by parties to legal transactions, rather than on written documents: it is striking that the legal writer Gaius, of the middle of the second century AD, imagines the Emperor requiring the *princeps* of a foreign *populus* to make a verbal promise to keep the peace – 'pacem futuram spondes?' (*Inst.* iii, 94). Equally, for instance, an *edictum* had originally been literally that, a pronouncement 'spoken out' to the people by a magistrate, normally from the rostra, the speaker's platform in the Forum in Rome.

It is important to stress that the role of issuing verbal pronouncements or decisions remained an essential element in the functions of the Emperor. He delivered *orationes* to the Senate (though these could be read in his absence by the *quaestor Caesaris*); he also made *orationes* on occasion to the People, and *orationes* or *allocutiones* to the soldiers in Rome or the army in the field. Both coins and the representations of the Imperial military role on the Column of Trajan and the Column of Marcus Aurelius give particular prominence to this latter role. The Emperor also, as mentioned above, gave jurisdiction; as with any other person giving jurisdiction, the verdict (*decretum* or *sententia*) had to be read out by him, often from a written text so as to ensure complete accuracy. Finally, as noted earlier, the Emperor heard embassies from provincial communities in person, and had to make at least a provisional response verbally at the time, even though the definitive reply was invariably embodied subsequently in a letter.

It was precisely such letters, as we have seen, which formed the type of Imperial pronouncement most frequently enshrined by these provincial communities in permanent inscriptions; hence they are among the documents whose formal character is best known to us. That still leaves open, however, the question of by whom they were in reality composed. Somewhat similar problems arise with Imperial answers to *libelli*, or

written petitions from individuals. These were, originally at least, handed to the Emperor in person; and the replies, referred to in the second century as *subscriptiones*, were in principle literally 'written under' the petitions themselves, and given back. There is no need here to go into the complex question of the evolution of the *libellus* system, except to say that it does bear in an important way on major questions in Roman law, for Imperial replies to *libelli* from private persons make up almost the whole of the *Codex Justinianus*, and are extensively quoted in the *Digest*, in other legal sources from Gaius onwards, and on inscriptions and papyri. They appear in large numbers in the *Codex* and *Digest* precisely because they are being quoted as sources of law. Current arguments have not yet established whether we should see this branch of lawmaking as a function of the Emperors themselves, or allow it to be reclaimed for the jurists, including major ones such as Papinian, who successively occupied the secretarial post at the Emperor's side called *a libellis* (to do with *libelli*), or later *magister libellorum*. It might well be necessary here, too, to distinguish clearly between responsibility for the essential content of such a reply (which might often be of a yes-no form) and the composition of a text expressing the answer in appropriate legal language, with explanation and justification where required.[21]

By the second century, it was possible for such *libelli* to be forwarded to the Emperor by provincial governors, accompanied by a covering letter, both carried by messengers. Such an exchange, which took place in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, provides one of the very few glimpses we ever get of the archives of the Emperors, and how they were managed. Once again, however, the glimpse is indirect. The source is again an inscription, a bronze tablet discovered at Banasa (Morocco), and evidently put up by the beneficiaries of the Imperial grants in question. The two Imperial letters quoted are in response to letters from two successive governors of the Roman province of Mauretania Tingitana, each forwarding a *libellus* asking for the Roman citizenship for a chief of a tribal people in that region, the Zegrenses, or for members of his family:

[*c.* AD 168] Copy of a letter of our Emperors Antoninus and Verus, Augusti, to Coiiedius Maximus: we have read the *libellus* [petition] of Julianus the Zegrensian attached to your letter, and although the Roman citizenship is not normally granted by Imperial *indulgentia* to those tribesmen unless earned by the highest deserts, yet since you affirm that he is

[21] For the complex issues relating to *libelli* presented to the Emperor, and to the composition of the replies, see T. Honoré, *Emperors and Lawyers* (London, 1981); F. Millar, 'A New Approach to the Roman Jurists', *Journal of Roman Studies*, lxxvi (1986), 272-80, and 'L'Empereur romain comme décideur', to be published in *Typologie des états antiques*, ed. C. Nicolet (Paris, 1988).

among the most prominent among those peoples of his and most loyal in his prompt obedience in our interests (and we do not think that many households from among the Zegrenses will be able to claim the same of their services) and since [?] we wish as many as possible to be aroused by the honour conferred by us on that house to emulate Julianus, we do not hesitate to give the Roman citizenship, without prejudice to the law of the tribe, to him, his wife Ziddina, and their children Julianus, Maximus, Maximinus, Diogenianus.

[AD 177] Copy of a letter of the Emperors Antoninus and Commodus, Augusti, to Vallius Maximianus: we have read the *libellus* of the chief of the tribes of the Zegrenses and have noted the favour with which he is regarded by your predecessor Epidius Quadratus, and also moved by the latter's testimonies, and the services and evidence of his conduct which he himself puts forward, have given to his wife and children the Roman citizenship, without prejudice to the law of the tribe. In order that this may be recorded in our *commentarii* [records] find out what the age of each is and write to us.

Copied down and checked from the record [*commentarius*] of those given the Roman citizenship by the Divine Augustus [names of preceding emperors] ... which the freedman Asclepiodotus produced, as it is written below:

In the consulship of Imperator Caesar L. Aurelius Commodus Aug. and M. Plautius Quintilius, on the day before the nones of July, at Rome [6 July 177].

Faggura, wife of Julianus, *princeps* of the tribe of the Zegrensians, age 22, Juliana, age 8, Maxima, age 4, Julianus, age 3, Diogenia, age 2, children of Julianus mentioned above:

At the request *per libellum* of Aurelius Julianus, princeps of the Zegrensians supported by Vallius Maximianus by letter [*suffragante ... per epistulam*], to these we have given the Roman citizenship, without prejudice to the law of the tribe, and without diminution of the *tributa* and *vectigalia* of the *populus* and the *fiscus*.

Carried out on the same day in the same place under the same consuls. Asclepiodotus, freedman: I have checked it:

Witnesses:

M. Gavius Squilla Gallicanus	[consul, 150]
M. Acilius Glabrio	[consul, 152]
T. Sextius Lateranus	[consul, 154]
C. Septimius Severus	[consul, 160]
P. Julius Scapula Tertullus	[consul, 160-6]
T. Varius Clemens	[ex-*ab epistulis*]

M. Bassaeus Rufus	[ex-Praetorian Prefect]
P. Taruttinus Paternus	[Praetorian Prefect by 179]
Sex [Tigidius Peren]nis	[probably Praetorian Prefect]
Q. Cervidius Scaevola	[lawyer, prefect of *Vigiles*, 175]
Q. Larcius Euripianus	
T. Flavius Piso	[Prefect of the Corn Supply, 179][22]

What is relevant in this context is, first, the unexpected revelation of a continuous system of recording the names of persons granted the Roman citizenship, going all the way back to the first Emperor, Augustus, who had died more than a century-and-a-half earlier. It must remind us that we *may* seriously underestimate the sophistication of an Imperial archival system to which we have no direct access; and it must at least raise the question of whether any comparable archival system recorded diplomatic and foreign relations beyond the Imperial frontier. Second, once again, it may remind us that 'the Imperial frontier' itself is not an unambiguous concept. Roman dealings with the unsubdued tribal peoples of western Mauretania had themselves in part the character of foreign, or diplomatic, relations. In this instance, Roman citizenship is being sought by someone who clearly lay at best on the margins of the urban, literate world of Graeco-Roman culture. The document also touches on another ambiguity characteristic of what we might otherwise want to call Roman 'foreign' policy. Like the Herodian kings who ruled one area or another in the Palestine region in the first century, or the kings of the Bosporan kingdom (the eastern Crimea and western Tuman peninsula across the straits) throughout the whole period with which we are concerned, this family of Moroccan tribal chiefs were henceforth to be Roman citizens. The citizenship was another respect in which the nature of a strict 'frontier' between Roman and non-Roman does not apply. Finally, it is striking that even at this late stage there is a reflection of the ambiguous sovereignty prevailing in the Roman state itself. The taxes and duties which the beneficiaries will still have to pay are due both to the Imperial *fiscus* and to the *populus*.

If we come back to the governmental and bureaucratic practice of the Imperial court, Cassius Dio, it will be recalled, had specified letters as one area where the Emperor would certainly need an aide of equestrian rank (p. 356). It is noticeable, however, that here, in clear contrast with the passage where he speaks of the reception of foreign embassies by the Senate (p. 348), he is thinking of the internal working of the Empire. Some of this Imperial correspondence was addressed, invariably in

[22] M. Euzennat, J. Marion, J. Gascou, *Inscriptions antiques du Maroc* II: *Inscriptions latines* (Paris, 1982), no. 94.

Latin, to officials, in particular provincial governors; Pliny the Younger's correspondence with Trajan from the province of Pontus and Bithynia is only the best-known example of a standard form of exchange, which represents a central element in how the Empire was governed. Two specimens are, of course, incorporated into the document from Banasa just quoted. Equally, Imperial letters to cities in the Latin-speaking part of the Empire, of which only a rather modest number is preserved, were also naturally written in Latin.

But very different considerations applied to cities and provincial councils in the Greek-speaking half of the Empire. Here, all the letters from Emperors and from governors, which inscriptions put up by these cities reveal, are written in Greek. The suspicion that the original letters might have been translated from Latin in the city concerned, in order to make them more readily intelligible to passers-by who stopped – as they might when entering the theatre of Aphrodisias — to read the inscribed documents, is natural, but in fact not justified. For those inscribed archives, or perhaps pseudo-archives, which also incorporate letters between officials, which were originally written in Latin, leave the texts in Latin and do not translate them.[23]

It thus seems highly probable that the Greek cities of the eastern part of the Empire were paid the compliment, in yet another and very precise respect, of having letters addressed to them which had been written in Greek, or translated into Greek, at the Imperial court itself. In this sense too, therefore, they were treated as foreign powers, to whom a diplomatic form of address was appropriate. The probability that this was so becomes a certainty when we consider the relatively well-known history of the office of *ab epistulis* (to do with letters).[24] This office existed in some form from the beginning of the Empire, and comes more clearly into view in the middle of the first century AD, when it was primarily occupied by freed slaves from the Imperial household. Precisely this aspect served to give it and comparable offices some prominence in historical and biographical sources such as Tacitus and Suetonius; for it was generally felt, looking back some decades later, that in the middle of the Julio-Claudian period, and in particular in the reign of Claudius (AD 41-54), Imperial freedmen serving in close proximity to the Emperor had exercised an excessive, damaging, and corrupting influence. In the course of the following period, positions such as *ab epistulis*, *a*

[23] For a prime case, see the exchanges relating to the temple of Zeus at Aezani in the province of Asia: U. Laffi, 'I terreni del tempio di Zeus ad Aizanoi', *Athenaeum*, xlix (1971), 3-53.

[24] For this office, or evolving separate offices, see Millar, *The Emperor*, esp. ch. iii, pts. 5-6, and v, pt. 2.

libellis, and *a rationibus* (to do with accounts) began to pass instead into the hands of men of free birth belonging to the rank immediately below the Senate, the equestrian order; a process complete by the reign of Hadrian (AD 117-38), when one of the *ab epistulis* was the biographer Suetonius. At the same time, however, we find the emergence of a separate post defined as *ab epistulis Graecis* (to do with letters in Greek). Such a post, or one defined in closely comparable terms, had been attested on some occasions in the middle of the first century. Indeed it is striking that these posts are the earliest 'secretarial' posts with the Emperor to appear on public inscriptions as being held by men who are not freed slaves, but Roman citizens of equestrian rank. Both the known examples from this period are in fact Roman citizens of Greek origin. Tiberius Claudius Balbillus appears in a Latin inscription from Ephesos as *ad legationes* (to do with embassies) *et res[ponsa Graeca?]* – it is typical that the text should be broken at the crucial point. This problem at least does not appear in the Greek inscription from Cos, his native city, honouring Claudius' doctor, C. Stertinius Xenophon, who is also described as holding the post of *epi tōn Ellēnikōn apokrimatōn* (to do with pronouncements, or replies, in Greek). How exactly we should translate *apokrima* is not clear, but hardly matters in this context, as the sphere of activity is clear enough. It is equally so in the entry in a Byzantine lexicon which describes another Greek, of the second half of the first century, Dionysius of Alexandria, as 'in charge of the *epistolai* and *presbeiai* [embassies] and *apokrimata*'. From the reign of Hadrian onwards, the role is well attested, and in particular is known to have been held by a number of the fashionable and famous Greek orators celebrated in the *Lives of the Sophists* of Philostratus, written in the first half of the third century. That fact alone would tend to suggest that their role related to the formulation of Imperial letters in correct Greek style. And in fact this function is made quite explicit in what Philostratus says of one of these men, Aspasius, who held office in the early third century. The other Philostratus mentioned was the writer's nephew (*Vit. Soph.* ii, 33):

> The epistle composed by Philostratus called *How to Write Letters* is aimed at Aspasius, who on being appointed Imperial secretary wrote certain letters in a style more controversial than is suitable; and others he wrote in obscure language, though neither of these qualities is becoming to an emperor. For an emperor when he writes a letter ought not to use rhetorical syllogisms or trains of reasoning, but ought to express only his own will; nor again should he be obscure, since he is the voice of the law, and lucidity is the interpreter of the law.

In the course of the second century, the division of functions naturally led to the other secretary concerned with letters being described as *ab epistulis Latinis*. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that their respective functions were already not very different from those later described in the *Notitia Dignitatum* of around AD 400:

Magister epistolarum: deals with embassies from cities, *consultationes* [enquiries by letter from officials] and *preces* [petitions].

Magister epistolarum graecarum: those letters which are customarily issued [*emitti*] in Greek he either dictates himself or if dictated in Latin translates into Greek.

Thus, in evidence from various periods, while a clear functional connection is made between incoming embassies and the letters which needed to be written in reply to them, the latter role tends to be the more prominent, and to determine the titulature of the officials concerned. Far more important for our purposes, however, is the contrast between the very clear effect on the structure and functioning of the Imperial entourage of the respect paid to the Greek cities of the Empire on the one hand, and the total absence on the other of any precise apparatus to handle diplomatic relations beyond the frontier.

As regards a large proportion of the areas with which the Empire was in some permanent or repeatedly renewed relationship, we could simply suppose that the same apparatus designed for 'internal' exchanges of a diplomatic type could be applied without difficulty – indeed in the case of 'client' kings without any clear distinction – to relations which might be regarded as 'external'. It can, for instance, be assumed without question that Greek was the diplomatic language of all letters to and from kings on the Eastern perimeter of the Empire, from the Bosporan kingdom on the north coast of the Black Sea to Armenia, Commagene (finally absorbed in about AD 72), Osrhoene on the other side of the Euphrates, absorbed in AD 213-14, Nabatea (Arabia), absorbed in AD 106, and even Parthia itself, as well as its Persian successor empire of the 220s onwards. We have in the case of the Parthian empire a precise parallel in the respect shown to the 'Greekness' of the Greek cities within its borders. For the only documentary example which we have of a letter written by a Parthian king is one written in AD 21 by Artabanus III to the city of Seleucia on the Eulaeus, the ancient Susa in present-day Iran.[25] As with the numerous letters of Roman Emperors to Greek cities, of which some examples are mentioned above, we owe our knowledge of

[25] C.B. Welles, *Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period* (New Haven-London, 1934), no. 75.

this letter to the fact that the city concerned had it publicly inscribed. It follows, however, and could not be doubted on more general grounds, that the Parthians will always have had the capacity to conduct diplomatic relations with the Roman Empire, or specifically with the Emperor, in Greek. This will have remained true even in the later period, when it is generally thought that, in broader cultural terms, the long-lasting influence of the Greek culture imported into the Middle East by Alexander had begun perceptibly to decline. So, for instance, there is the evidence of a wonderful new discovery, a bronze statue of the Greek hero Herakles, captured by the Parthian King Vologaeses in AD 150 in the course of his conquest of the little kingdom of Mesene, at the head of the Persian Gulf, and dedicated by him in the temple of Apollo situated in another Greek city, Seleucia on the Tigris. The fact is recorded on a bilingual inscription, in Greek and Parthian (the latter written in Aramaic letters) on the statue itself.[26]

We can thus assume without difficulty that when the Emperor Macrinus, who seized power after the murder of Caracalla in Mesopotamia in 217, sent 'friendly messages, and returned captives' to the Parthian King Artabanus, the letter and any accompanying exchanges were in Greek (Cassius Dio lxxix, 29, 2). Greek was to remain one of the royal languages of the new Persian Empire, as is illustrated most clearly by the great inscription of Shapur I from Naqsh-e-Rustam (p. 346 above), set up in three languages, Greek, Middle Persian, and Parthian.

The same predominance of Greek as an international language can be assumed for all the kingdoms, of varying size and stability, which were to be found in the broad zone between the Red Sea and the Black Sea. An inscription from the city of Priene in Asia Minor happens to allude quite casually to the fact that as early as 129 BC an ambassador had gone 'to Petra of Arabia', the Nabatean capital, for what purpose is not known.[27] We can be certain that the ambassador from this Greek city did not devote himself to studying the Nabatean language (a dialect of Aramaic) before he set off. Nabatean official use of Greek is shown not only on their coinage of the Hellenistic period, but also for instance in dedications which one of their kings, Rabbel, like other kings, placed on the Capitol in Rome. In fact it was made for him by his ambassadors, described in Greek as *presbeutai*.[28] The same will, beyond question, apply to the dynasty of the kings of the Bosporus, since the language of

[26] Published in *The Land between Two Rivers: Twenty Years of Italian Archaeology in the Middle East* (Torino, 1985), pp. 423-5, no. 231.

[27] See G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 22.

[28] A. Degrassi, 'Le dediche di popoli e re asiatici al popolo romano e a Giove Capitolino', *Bull. Comm. arch. com. di Roma*, lxxiv (1952), 19-47, on p. 34, no. 20 = *Scritti vari di Antichità* I (Rome, 1962), pp. 415-44.

the kingdom and the cities within it was entirely Greek. In the correspondence between Pliny the Younger, as governor of Pontus and Bithynia, and Trajan we happen to catch a glimpse of a letter being transmitted by Sauromates I (AD 93-4 – 123-4) to Hadrian. Indeed, we find a complex set of exchanges proceeding simultaneously. A messenger (*tabellarius*) from the king arrives in Bithynia carrying a letter to Trajan, and also one to Pliny himself, urging him to send the messenger onwards with all speed, as the letter to the Emperor contains things he urgently needs to know. At the same time an embassy from the Bosporus, or more precisely from the king, is pursuing a more leisurely journey through Bithynia on its way to Rome (Pliny, *Letters* X, 63; 64; 67).

The embassy was probably intending to present itself before Trajan, but it could still have been brought by him before the Senate. For the latest definite evidence which we have for such an appearance relates to the following reign, that of Hadrian (AD 117-38). The kings of the Bosporus were the most stable and long-lasting of all the 'client' dynasties of Rome, and the only one which minted (or was allowed by Rome to mint?) gold coins. The coins invariably portrayed both King and Emperor. But the titulature of the kings implicitly expressed a dual loyalty, which reflected the dual sovereignty inherent in the Empire itself: *philokaisar* and *philoromaios*. What that meant is spelled out in a Latin inscription in honour of Sauromates I, put up in Panticapaeum in the Crimea by the *colonia* of Sinope on the opposite coast of the Black Sea: 'King Ti[berius] Iul[ius] Sauromates, an outstanding friend of the Emperor and of the *populus R*[*omanus*]'.[29]

If this dual sovereignty was more important, and was reflected in our sources for a longer period than has been realized, it is still the case that actual communication with foreign powers, and even 'client' kings, were always conducted by the Emperor. If he chose also to bring foreign rulers and embassies from them, before the Senate, that was at all times a gesture which did not affect the realities of decision-making. It is worth noting the elaborate form which this gesture took on the latest occasion of its use, so far as our narrative sources indicate, that is in the reign of Hadrian. This is how Cassius Dio, writing a century later, records the relevant episode (lxix, 15, 2):

When ambassadors were sent by Vologaeses [king of Parthia] bringing charges against Pharasmanes [king of Iberia in the Caucasus] and by the Iazyges, who wished to have peace confirmed, he introduced them into the

[29] I. Struve, *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani* (Moscow, 1965), no. 46.

Senate; and being commissioned to prepare the answers, he composed them himself and read them to them.

By 'them' Dio seems to mean not the Senate collectively (which he refers to in the singular) but the ambassadors. Whether or not Dio is right in his clear implication that Hadrian wrote the letters himself, what he says raises acute problems about the nature of Roman diplomacy in this period, some of which have already been adumbrated.

First, the practice of bringing foreign embassies before the Senate may have continued longer than has been previously supposed, and indeed into the lifetime of Cassius Dio. For a very fragmentary Latin papyrus, recently discussed for the first time as a historical source, is certainly an extract from the *acta* (proceedings) of the Senate, dates to the reign of Commodus (AD 180-92), and seems to show exchanges with an embassy ([*I*]*egatio*) which may be one from the central European tribe known as the Buri; at any rate, in a typically frustrating way, the word Bu[ri?] can be read in the papyrus. It was already known from Cassius Dio (lxxii, 3, 1-2) that Commodus had 'granted peace' to this Germanic people early in his reign.[30]

Second, there are questions of procedure. In its dealings with foreign peoples, the Senate had always used, for the reception of embassies, a minimally adjusted version of its standard proceedings. It functioned essentially by the presentation of the relevant subject-matter by the presiding magistrate, usually a consul or praetor, the giving of opinions by the more senior senators in order of precedence, and where necessary a vote by division. Embassies, whether appearing singly or in competition or dispute with each other, were simply heard after being introduced by the presiding magistrate, and the rest of the procedure continued as normal. As with the Emperor, one could say that diplomacy was simply 'embedded' in a more general framework of government, in which verbal exchanges and pronouncements played a predominant part. Like the Emperor, the Senate had at its disposal no specific agency for the bureaucratic or professional management of foreign relations, or for the preparation of missives to foreign powers. It was, however, normal for inscribed texts of treaties to be put up on the Capitol (p. 350 above).

In the Republic, the Senate had also performed the diplomatic function of sending embassies from within its own ranks to negotiate with foreign powers. Once again, the function was embedded in the more general exercise of a public political role, and no core of specialist diplomats existed. In the Empire, however, no trace of this function can be

[30] R.J.A. Talbert, 'Commodus as Diplomat in an Extract from the Acta Senatus', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, lxxi (1988), pp. 137-47.

found at all. By an odd paradox, the only embassies which the Senate now sent were ones with the function of addressing the Emperor himself, or members of his family.

The active conduct of foreign relations therefore rested entirely with the Emperor, his advisers, and his entourage. But various problems suggested by Dio's account of Hadrian's dealings with the embassies from Vologaeses and the Iazyges still present themselves. We can be sure, as mentioned above, that letters from and to Vologaeses will have been in Greek, just as the Parthian ambassadors may well have spoken in the Senate in Greek. Whoever was 'in charge of Greek letters' and perhaps simultaneously responsible for receiving embassies, could have dealt with Parthia, exactly as he dealt with a Greek city within the Empire.

But if the rules and the language of diplomatic contact presented no problems as between a Roman Emperor and a Greek-speaking, or Greek-using kingdom, what of the Iazyges, a people of Iranian origin inhabiting the territory between Roman Dacia and the lower course of the Danube before it reaches the Black Sea? It is striking how our sources repeatedly describe verbal contacts with the barbarian peoples of Europe, as of Africa, while only rarely making the slightest allusion to the mechanics of how these exchanges were conducted.

The first thing that has to be made clear is that there is no sign of anything that could be described as permanent diplomatic representation on either side. The Romans maintained no resident ambassadors or legations either in 'client' kingdoms or among any other peoples with whom they had diplomatic or military contacts. The nearest to a Roman representative that our sources offer would be the officers of military units, which are occasionally found stationed in allied kingdoms. Even this is not common; but we do find some Roman forces stationed in the kingdom of the Bosporus, mentioned above; Roman forces were supporting a Roman nominee to the throne there in AD 51 (Tacitus, *Annals* xii, 15); and Josephus records that there were as many as 3,000 Roman troops in this general area in AD 66 (*Jewish War* ii. 16, 4, 366). Others are also attested from time to time in the Caucasus. A famous Greek inscription from Harmozica (Tiflis) of AD 75 also shows Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian having fortifications built 'for king Mithridates of the Hiberi, son of King Pharasmanes and Iamaspos [?] his son, *philokaisar* and *philoromaios*, and for the people of the Hiberi'.[31] This almost certainly means that Roman forces were present. They are more clearly attested in a Latin inscription put up by a *legatus* of the Legion XII Fulminata, from near Baku on the Caspian Sea under Domitian (AD

[31] M. McCrum, A.G. Woodhead, *Select Documents of the Principates of the Flavian Emperors* (Cambridge, 1961), no. 237.

81-96) – notable as the easternmost Latin inscription so far known (*Ann. Épig.* 1951, no. 263).

However, neither permanent military occupation by Roman forces nor any other standing Roman presence should be assumed as the norm for any of the 'client' or allied states on Rome's borders. Indeed, as regards military relations, the current went the other way. It was extremely common for barbarian or semi-barbarian peoples on Rome's borders to provide auxiliary units for the Roman army. This is an important topic which cannot be pursued here, though we may note that such units included *Bosporani*, and that Arminius, the victor of the famous defeat of the Roman *legatus*, Quinctilius Varus, in the battle of the Teutoburger Forest in AD 9, had not only led Cheruscan forces in Roman service, but was himself a Roman citizen, and even had the status of *eques* (Velleius Paterculus ii, 118, 2). It is more important to stress that the provision of military contingents for service with Rome is well attested as a specific provision of peace-treaties concluding hostilities; one example will be given below.

If there was no permanent Roman diplomatic representation among allied peoples, the same is also true in the reverse direction. The notion of established representation at the political centres of foreign peoples, whether monarchies or not, was unknown in Antiquity. The only representatives of foreign powers who might be living in Rome were of a different sort, namely hostages. A considerable volume of literary and inscriptional evidence illustrates the presence in Rome of hostages from a variety of regions beyond the Empire. They could indeed be regarded, as by Pliny the Elder, supplementing his knowledge of the Caucasus region, as sources of geographical information (*Nat. Hist.* vi, 23), or of course as Roman nominees in disputes over the occupancy of thrones in 'client' kingdoms. There is only a narrow line between these and the children whom 'client' kings often sent to Rome to be educated, as Herod the Great did two of his sons. When Roman coinage claimed, as it on occasion did, that a king had been 'given' (*datus*) to a people beyond the borders, it was often a hostage or royal child, already available, and suitably Romanized, who was sent out in this role.[32]

It is only however in a very loose sense that such hostages or members of royal families, more or less voluntarily resident in Rome, could be considered as diplomatic representatives. To make such a claim would be on the contrary to miss the essential point that all diplomatic transactions were conducted *ad hoc* either by the dispatch of ambassadors to the seat of power, or on occasion by face-to-face negotiations conducted in person by the Emperor, or a member of his family, with a foreign king.

[32] See Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King*, pp. 9 ff.

The latter is more fully attested in the following period, the 'crisis' of the third century, and increasingly so in the fourth century, where a detailed narrative is available from Ammianus Marcellinus. But diplomacy at a distance, as conducted by Rome, is not so easy to grasp. As we have seen in sufficient detail already, the opposite process, the arrival of foreign ambassadors in Roman territory, is frequently described. For instance, the documents from the famous archaeological site of Dura-Europos on the Euphrates show a Parthian ambassador on his way to appear before Septimius Severus and Caracalla. The governor of Syria Coele gives instructions that he is to be offered upkeep in the normal manner:

Marius Maximus to the *tribuni* and *praefecti and praepositi numerorum*, greeting:
I have attached a copy of the letter which I have written to Minicius Martialis, *procurator* of our *Augusti*, so that you may take note of it. Take care that the quartermaster's offices of the *numeri* through which Goces, an ambassador of the Parthians, sent to our Lords the most valiant Emperors, is in transit offer him upkeep according to the normal form. Report to me whatever is spent in each *numerus*.[33]

The document shows quite clearly that, as with the Bosporan embassy on its way through Bithynia which Pliny sent on, the movement of ambassadors sent to appear before Emperors far away in Rome or elsewhere was a routine matter. If, as seems likely, the document from Dura dates to AD 208, the ambassador may in the end have had rather a long way to go, for in that year Severus, with his two sons, Caracalla and Geta, set off to campaign in Britain, where he died at York in 211. If Goces did only encounter Severus on campaign, facilities were still likely to have been available for his reception. A writer of the second century, Hyginus, describing a model military camp in which the Imperial entourage was present, mentions the *quaestorium*, which housed ambassadors of the enemy and hostages, and in which booty, if any, was stored.[34]

We shall come later to some evidence which does clearly illustrate the reception by the Emperor of barbarian embassies while on campaign. But the problem still remains of what procedures were used by the Emperors in communicating with foreign powers. The notion of letters from the Emperor to kings is clearly attested. For instance, Suetonius

[33] Recently discussed by M.L. Chaumont, 'Un document méconnu concernant l'envoi d'un ambassadeur parthe vers Septime Sévère (P. Dura 60B)', *Historia*, xxxvi (1987), 422-47.

[34] Hyginus, *de munitionibus castrorum* 18, ed. and trans. M. Lenoir, *Pseudo-Hygin des fortifications du camp* (Paris, 1979).

happens to mention that Tiberius did not use the name 'Augustus' except in letters to kings and dynasts (*Tib.* 26). The fact that he also used it in letters to cities does not entirely invalidate the notion that writing letters to kings and dynasts was a specific Imperial function, in which the Emperor needed to emphasize his superior status. However, such letters, like those to cities discussed above, might in many cases have been carried back by ambassadors who had appeared before the Emperor. In consequence, no procedure was required beyond the writing of the letter itself. But suppose no foreign embassy were to hand, and it were necessary to communicate spontaneously with a foreign power, or conduct negotiations beyond the frontier? In the case of a king whose loyalty to the Empire was beyond question, it might have been feasible for a mere messenger to carry a letter, the counterpart of the *tabellarius* of Sauromates I on his way to deliver a letter to Trajan (p. 365 above). Such a procedure seems, however, not to be concretely attested, though it may have been employed. For any delicate situation, it is much more probable that a high-status emissary will have gone. But here too the evidence is remarkably sparse. A modest Greek historian of the mid-third century, Herodian, does however record something of the sort, in typically vague terms. In describing the exchanges after the rise of the new Persian Empire in the 220s, he relates that Severus Alexander sent Artaxerxes/Ardashir an embassy (*presbeia*) with a letter warning him of the dangers of serious conflict with Rome (vi. 2, 3-4). But he says nothing of the rank or function of the person, or persons, who constituted the embassy. Then, when Alexander had reached Antioch on his way to the Eastern frontier, he sent another *presbeia*. Artaxerxes sent the ambassadors back empty-handed, soon followed by 400 Persian cavalry as a diplomatically veiled threat; they were however promptly disarmed and settled in Asia Minor (vi. 4, 4-6). How far Herodian's representation of these events is more than fanciful is in any case an open question.

What seems to be the only evidence from the whole of this period for an emissary of high rank conducting negotiations beyond the frontier is contained in a report by Cassius Dio of how in about 170 the Cotini, living somewhere north of the middle Danube, were able to capture and maltreat Tarrutienus Paternus, the *ab epistulis Latinis* of Marcus Aurelius, on the pretext that they were going to join in combined operations against the Marcomanni (lxxi, 12, 3). It seems evident from this brief report that Paternus had been sent to them to negotiate, and was thus exposed to capture. If so, it is another clear indication of the use for external purposes of a court functionary whose role, at least as far as we can grasp it, was normally related to internal correspondence (with

officials, or Latin-speaking communities in the Empire). It is furthermore not unlikely that, like his Greek equivalent (p. 362 above), the *ab epistulis Latinis* may normally have had some role in the reception of embassies from Latin-speaking communities. By extension, therefore, he may have been a natural choice to negotiate beyond the frontier.

That serves, however, merely to raise a further problem: in what language did one conduct negotiations with the Cotini, or with any other unsubdued people beyond the frontier? The notion that high-status Romans ever learned to speak any of the Germanic, Celtic, Thracian, or Iranian languages used beyond the frontier in the Eurasian land-mass can be safely dismissed, as can any similar notion relating to the languages of North Africa. The one possible exception here is Punic, attested as a spoken and written language throughout the period concerned.[35] But there is nothing to show that it actually was employed as a vehicle of diplomatic communication, spoken or written. In Mauretania, at least, it is certain, as a whole series of (Latin) inscriptions from Volubilis attests, that third-century governors held repeated negotiations (*colloquia*) with chiefs of the Baquates. One such inscription which dates from AD 245 records that a *procurator* of Mauretania Tingitana had conducted a *conloquium* with Septemazinis, chief (*princeps*) of the *gens* of the Baquates 'for the sake of establishing peace'.[36] Nothing is said about the language of the 'colloquium'; we can however safely assume either that an interpreter was employed or that, like the *princeps* of the Zegrenses some decades earlier, Septemazinis had moved into the orbit of the Latin-using Mediterranean world.

Something comparable is clearly attested on the Rhine frontier in the early first century AD; chiefs of Cherusci, and indeed an ordinary rank-and-file soldier, are described as having learnt Latin as a result of military service with Rome (Tacitus, *Annals* ii, 9-10; 13). Although it is difficult to imagine that some mechanisms for mutual linguistic understanding were not employed along Rome's frontiers, the available evidence is extraordinarily slight: a soldier of Legion I Adiutrix at Brigetio in the early third century, described as *interprex Dacorum*, 'interpreter of [with?] the Dacians' (*Année Épigraphique* 1947, no. 35); or an 'interpreter of [for?]' the procurators in the bilingual (Greek and Aramaic, or even Arabic) region south of Damascus on the edge of the Syrian desert.[37] Such very enigmatic fragments of documentary evidence

[35] F. Millar, 'Local Cultures in the Roman Empire: Latin, Libyan and Punic in Roman Africa', *Journal of Roman Studies*, lviii (1968), 126-51.

[36] *Inscriptions antiques du Maroc* II, no. 359.

[37] R. Cagnat, *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes* III (Paris, 1896), no. 1191.

may be compared with the 'chief-interpreter of [with?] the Alani' attested in the Bosporan kingdom,[38] without giving us any clear notion of how significant a function interpretation, on the Roman side, was conceived to be. It would be a relatively safe assumption that the entire Roman system relied on the cultural dominance of the Graeco-Roman world to ensure that words addressed to Roman rulers or governors were in Latin, or, failing that, in Greek. In the elaborately staged scene in AD 66 when Tiridates, a member of the Parthian royal house, came to Rome to receive the crown (diadem) of Armenia from the hands of Nero, seated on a tribunal in the Forum at Rome, an interpreter was employed to translate his words of supplication for the benefit of the crowd (Suetonius, *Nero* 13). But, as we have seen above, it is at least as likely that Tiridates was speaking Greek as Parthian; and in the latter case it would have been unlikely that any qualified interpreter could have been found. It is significant that the person who acted as interpreter on this occasion is described as being of ex-praetor status, that is a relatively senior senator. Among persons of that class a fluent Greek speaker could easily be found.

Such an event, staged-managed at the centre of the Empire, leaves us entirely in the dark about the normal conduct of low-level exchanges between governors and military personnel on the one side, and leaders of unsubdued peoples on the fringes of the Empire on the other. The subject obviously deserves more detailed examination, however fragmentary and enigmatic the evidence would prove. What is rather better known are certain episodes requiring major negotiations involving leading senators, members of the Imperial family, or (increasingly) Emperors in person. It will be worthwhile, in conclusion, to look at a few of these.

Major negotiations, or campaigns, conducted by senators who were not members of the Imperial dynasties hardly outlasted the first century AD. The tendency to concentrate all major external functions in the hands of the Emperor in person is one of the most marked, and most significant, developments in Imperial history. However, at the end of Tiberius' reign, for instance, the governor of Syria, Lucius Vitellius, was commissioned to meet King Artabanus of Parthia on the Euphrates to conclude an agreement. The parties are stated to have met in the middle of a bridge over the river, each with an armed escort. Afterwards Herodes Antipas, the tetrarch (effectively a minor king) of Galilee, gave a dinner in a pavilion also constructed in midstream. The proceedings concluded with the dispatch to Tiberius of Artabanus' son Darius as a

[38] Struve, *Corpus Inscriptionum*, no. 1053.

hostage, accompanied by gifts including a freak, a Jew seven cubits tall (the presentation of freaks and curiosities to the Emperor would be an interesting sidelight on Imperial history, worth exploring for itself; compare those sent by an Indian king to Augustus, p. 350 above.)[39] Vitellius then duly sent a report to Tiberius, only to find that Herodes had anticipated him.

Suetonius gives a rather different account of the same episode, stressing that Artabanus crossed to the Roman side of the river and did formal obeisance to the Roman standards and the *imagines* of the Emperor. This symbolic procedure, for which, interestingly, the actual presence of the Emperor was more and more to substitute itself, is indeed attested on various occasions in the first century.[40]

The last major Eastern campaign to be conducted by senators from outside the Imperial house belongs to the reign of Nero (54-68). As regards the conduct of diplomacy, we find two senatorial governors in the East in 54 simultaneously sending 'messengers' (*nuntii*) to warn Vologaeses of Parthia to keep the peace, provide hostages, and observe the previous *reverentia* of Parthian kings towards the *populus Romanus*. The messengers were in each case military officers, a prefect of a cohort and a centurion (Tacitus, *Annals* xii, 9). Once again the absorption of diplomatic functions within a more general framework is made clear.

Some years later, in 62, when the Parthians launched an invasion of Armenia, where the Romans had installed their nominee as king, we again find the governor of Syria, Domitius Corbulo, sending a centurion as ambassador to upbraid the Parthian king for attacking a king allied to Rome, and the Roman auxiliary units which had been sent to support him. Vologaeses replied that he would send ambassadors to Nero: these later returned empty-handed (xiv, 5-7). When a Roman army was then forced to sue for terms, the emissary sent by its commander was again an auxiliary officer (xv, 15). The retreat of the Roman forces from Armenia was followed by a Parthian embassy to Nero in Rome, bringing a letter from Vologaeses, ironically stating that his own nominee for the throne of Armenia would be prepared to come to Rome to receive the diadem, but that religious prescriptions prevented him (xv, 24). Yet the great campaign into Armenia which Corbulo was then ordered to conduct very rapidly ended in formal negotiations between Corbulo and Vologaeses, conducted by emissaries (again centurions on the Roman side), followed by a formal ceremony at which Tiridates, as the Parthian

[39] For a collection of some of the evidence see Millar, *The Emperor*, pp. 139-40.

[40] Suetonius, *Cal.* 14. For the use of the Imperial image as the object of obeisance by foreign rulers or emissaries, see T. Pekáry, *Das römische Kaiserbildnis in Staat, Kult und Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1985), pp. 54-5.

nominee for the throne of Armenia, laid down his diadem before an *imago* of Nero (xv, 24-30), to receive it back in Rome three years later, at the great ceremony already mentioned.

No similar delegation of the conduct of a major campaign occurred later. When relations with Parthia broke down again under Trajan, the Emperor himself went to the East, and our narratives show a number of minor kings from within the Parthian empire presenting themselves before him in person. Then after two reigns, those of Hadrian (117-38) and Antoninus Pius (138-61), not marked by major wars, we reach the decisive turning-point after which all major wars were conducted by the, or an, Emperor; first Marcus Aurelius' co-emperor Lucius Verus, against the Parthians in 162-6, and then Marcus himself, almost continuously on the Danube frontier between the late 160s and his death there in 180. The characteristic shape of foreign relations, as they were to remain to the end of the fourth century, is already visible in Dio's description of Marcus, in his first years in Pannonia, dealing in person with delegations of barbarians from beyond the Danube (lxxi, 11, 1-4, Loeb trans.):

> Marcus Antoninus remained in Pannonia in order to give audience to the embassies of the barbarians; for many came to him at this time also. Some of them, under the leadership of Battarius, a boy twelve years old, promised an alliance; these received a gift of money and succeeded in restraining Tarbus, a neighbouring chieftain, who had come into Dacia and was demanding money and threatening to make war if he should fail to get it. Others, like the Quadi, asked for peace, which was granted them, both in the hope that they might be detached from the Marcomani, and also because they gave him many horses and cattle and promised to surrender all the deserters and the captives, besides – thirteen thousand at first, and later all the others as well. The right to attend the markets, however, was not granted to them, for fear that the Iazyges and the Marcomani, whom they had sworn not to receive nor to allow to pass through their country, should mingle with them, and passing themselves off for Quadi, should reconnoitre the Roman positions and purchase provisions. Besides these that came to Marcus, many others sent envoys, some by tribes and some by nations, and offered to surrender. Some of them were sent on campaigns elsewhere, as were also the captives and deserters who were fit for service; others received land in Dacia, Pannonia, Moesia, the province of Germany, and in Italy itself.

Very similar descriptions are given by Dio of Commodus' dealings with the barbarian peoples beyond the Danube, when Aurelius' death

left him as the Emperor in 180. Among them are the Buri, whose representations may later have appeared before the Senate (p. 367 above). Dio writes as follows (lxxiii, 2-3):

The Marcomani by reason of the multitude of their people that were perishing and the constant ravaging of their lands no longer had an abundance of either food or men. At any rate they sent only two of their chief men and two others of inferior rank as envoys to sue for peace. And, although Commodus might easily have destroyed them, yet he made terms with them; for he hated all exertion and was eager for the comforts of the city. In addition to the conditions that his father had imposed upon them he also demanded that they restore to him the deserters and the captives that they had taken in the meantime, and that they furnish annually a stipulated amount of grain – a demand from which he subsequently released them. Moreover, he obtained some arms from them and soldiers as well, thirteen thousand from the Quadi and a smaller number from the Marcomani; and in return for these he relieved them of the requirement of an annual levy.

Commodus granted peace to the Buri when they sent envoys. Previously he had declined to do so, in spite of their frequent requests, because they were strong, and because it was not peace that they wanted, but the securing of a respite to enable them to make further preparations; but now that they were exhausted he made peace with them, receiving hostages and getting back many captives from the Buri themselves as well as fifteen thousand from the others.

Perhaps equally significant, the image of the Emperor receiving the submission of conquered barbarians has an established place in the repertoire of Roman narrative art, as represented above all on the Column of Trajan and the Column of Marcus Aurelius.[41]

Comparable scenes illustrating the personal role of the Emperors in negotiating with barbarians or receiving their submission appear repeatedly in our narrative sources, right up to the moment in 375 when Valentinian, spending the winter at Brigetio in Pannonia, died of apoplexy on receiving an insolent answer from an embassy from the Quadi (Ammianus Marcellinus xxx, 6). So far as the major issues at least were concerned, the conduct of diplomacy, at all times embedded within the successive political structures of the Roman state, had long since been absorbed by the Emperors in person, who themselves had come to function more and more as commanders in the field. This apparent distortion of the nature of government seems wholly irrational, given what we

[41] For this point, see J.F. Matthews in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* X (Stuttgart, 1978), col. 660, art. 'Gesandtschaft'. See also N. Hannestadt, *Roman Art and Imperial Policy* (Aarhus, 1986), pp. 160-1, 231.

should suppose to have been the needs of a civilian population of some 50 million people. Yet immediately after Honorius and Arcadius, coming to the throne in 395, suddenly abandoned the role of commander-in-chief in the field, the Empire entered a period of military crisis from which the Western part of it never recovered. Mysterious as it is, diplomacy, or its absence, is not the most mysterious feature of the Roman Empire.

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